THE WEEKLY PORTAGE SENTINEL.

JAMES W. SOMERVILLE, PROPRIETOR. THE UNION—IT MUST BE PRESERVED. OFFICE IN PHOENIX BLOCK THIRD STORY.

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WOLFGANG,

—OR—

The Wrecker's Beacon.

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE THE GALE.

The good ship PATHFINDER, of New York, and bound to Copenhagen, had entered the North Sea, having left the Straits of Dover two days behind.

The commander of the ship was a young man, not over eight-and-twenty, and his name was MAURICE LESTER. He stood by the taffrail, gazing off upon the horizon to the eastward, ever and anon raising his hand above his head to feel if there was any wind stirring, and as often casting his eye aloft to see how the canvas hung. As he stood thus his mate approached, and spoke to him:

"What d'ye think of this, Capt'n?"

"I think we're in for a storm, sir," the master replied. "And I tell you what it is, Griffin," he added, after sweeping the horizon again with his eye, "when it comes it will be an earnest one. None of your broad Ocean puffs, with nothing but water to hatch wind from; but we'll have it right fresh from some of those places where they know how to make things blow."

"Then you think we'll have a hard one?" said Griffin.

"Aye," answered the captain, with almost a shudder, "I feel it in my bones."

In the meantime, Captain Lester had been watching the sea and sky as before, and he fancied that the signs of the storm were growing more and more palpable every moment. The sun was going down in a thick bank, giving to the whole western horizon a dull, purplish-red, bloody hue, with here and there spots of a darker tinge, like openings, through the fiery cloud, looking upon a fearful blackness behind.

"Do you see how strangely it looks off there?" said the captain, raising his finger towards the point where the sun was setting.

"Aye," returned Griffin, "I have been watching those dark places."

And others noticed the same thing, and spoke of it, too.

Seven o'clock came and went. Eight o'clock came, and the first watch was set.

"Don't go below," said the captain, as the men of the last dog-watch left their stations. "This calm can't last a great while. You had better batten down the hatches now, while there is nothing else to do; for I am sure there will be need of having them close before the coming of another day."

The men had had no thoughts of going below, for they could see and feel; and they were not wholly ignorant of what was coming; so they went at work and secured the hatches with thick tarpaulins; and when this was done those who had no particular station collected about the wheel. Another hour passed away—and another. Ten o'clock came, and still not a breath. The ship lay upon the water like a dead thing, with the ropes, and blocks, and sails, rattling and flapping as she was swayed to and fro by the lazy swells of the sea.

"What *does* it mean?" cried Griffin, as the boy struck five bells.

"Hark!" said the captain, almost instantly. "I guess you'll soon see. Did you feel that?—Ha!—and that?"

It was a puff of wind, and a light flying of spray; or, perhaps it was a spit of rain. At all events, the puff was felt; and the drops of water fell upon other cheeks than Maurice Lester's; and other ears than his heard the dull moaning which came over the dark waters. So other ears heard the roar which followed, and other bodies quivered beneath the shock of the storm-giant when he came in his might.

Aye—the storm had come. It came with wind and rain, and with an angry heaving of the sea. It came with a darkness like Erebus, and with the voice of thunder. The gale continued to increase in fury as the long night passed away. When morning came the scene was one of awful grandeur. The wind was howling with terrific fury; and the broad sea was lashed into huge mountains, that foamed, and tumbled, and leaped along over the bosom of the deep, seeming every moment ready to whelm and engulf the frail bark that struggled within the demon grasp.

When Captain Lester had observed the signs of the morning, he feared that the storm would continue through the day, and so he told his men. The sky wore a hue of horror, and rain was now driving down, mingling with the lashing sea. At noon it was still worse.

At length night shut in again, and not a sign yet of the passing away of the storm! The frightful howling of the tempest seemed rather to have increased than abated. The men gathered upon the quarter deck, clinging for support to the racks and rails—for the life lines swayed so much that they were afraid of them—gathered as near to the light of the binnacle-lamp as they could, as though even from such feeble beams they might find some comfort. But not all were there. No—not all! Four stout, true hearted men had been swept away by the storm. Near a score were left; but how many shall see the light of another day?

At nine o'clock Captain Lester went below. He took down a chart of the North Sea, and having spread it upon the table, he sat down to examine it. He was thus engaged when Mr. Griffin came down; but he did not look up until he had finished the calculation.

"How is it?" the mate asked, as he saw his commander lay down the dividers.

"I have been making a reckoning, and I find that we have but little more sea room left. The course we have made since we wore, has been, as near as I can calculate, north-west-by-west, so that we must have been driving towards the coast of Northumberland. I think we have plenty of room to stand on until midnight; but we cannot stand on much longer. If the gale does not abate by that time I know not what we shall do."

The captain started up from his chair, and would probably have walked across the cabin, but at that moment a heavy sea caught the ship, and gave her a pitch forward, which caused him to catch his seat as quickly as possible. As soon as the flood had gone from the deck, and the vessel had struggled up from the shock, he looked into his companion's face, and said, in a voice made tremulous by deeper emotion than he had before manifested:

"Griffin, I have something upon my mind more than you know; and I am anxious to communicate it, too. I must tell it now, for I have a strange foreboding of coming ill.—Something is to happen that will bear great calamity to some of us. I am not croaking—I am only reading what the Unseen has written in my soul. However, you shall hear my story. You have heard that my parents were both lost at sea?"

"Yes," said the mate.

"And perhaps you know that they were lost in this sea?"

"I have heard so, sir."

"Aye—so it was. I was a boy then.—They were on their way to Copenhagen, as we should be now. My father commanded the ship—she was called the '*Clara Jane*.'—She was named for my mother; and she was a staunch, noble craft. I was at school then, in Troy; and when I knew that my parents were dead I was well nigh mad with grief. I fancied then, in my first hours of orphanage, that my heart would break; and I think such would have been the case if they had kept me at school. But some of those who cared for me came to see me, and it was finally arranged that I should go to sea.—And I prospered—prospered so well that, when I was twenty years old, they gave me command of a ship.

"The man who owned the ship which I first commanded was named Thornton. He had a daughter named Carrie—one of the sweetest, purest, and loveliest creatures that ever graced this poor life of earth. She was four years younger than myself; but even when I first knew her—and she was not then more than fourteen—she was a woman in intellect and grace, though a child in simplicity of love and confidence. Mr. Thornton did not object to my suit, so I loved her with all my soul, and was blessed to know that she loved me in return. It had been arranged that we should be married when she was twenty years old,—that had been our plan for more than two years, Mr Thornton having set the bounds himself. I lacked two months of the time, and I had arranged to remain at home until we were married. But—Thornton had a heavy ship freighted for Copenhagen, and her captain was dying. He could find no one to take his place but me, and he asked me to go. I could not refuse; but I asked that I might be married first. Mr. Thornton shook his head, and said no. But he had another plan which he said would be better. He had been planning to visit Copenhagen, where he had two brothers in business—they were in company with him—and he said he would take the next ship, and bring Carrie out with him, and we should be married there. I finally consented to take out the new ship, and Mr. Thornton, with his daughter, was to meet me in Copenhagen, and there we were to be married, and all three come home together. The evening before I sailed I spent with Carrie, and when I left her I felt that I was leaving my very life.

"Well," continued Lester, wiping his eyes "I went to Copenhagen. I waited a month—then I heard that the American ship, '*White Fawn*,' with William Thornton and daughter on board, had touched at Dover, and that all were safe and well when she left. I waited another week, and then I crossed over to Hamburg; but I could learn nothing there. Next I went to London, and there I learned enough to assure me that the ship had been lost! On the second day after she left Dover a severe storm had arisen, and several vessels had been reported lost. I sent my ship home in charge of the mate, and spent four months in searching after the lost ones; but I could gain no trace of them. Not even a piece of the wreck could I find—not a mark of the ship nor of one of its crew! I came home with a sad and heavy heart."

Maurice Lester stopped a few moments, and bowed his head upon his hands, for his feelings had almost overcome him. In a little while, however, he looked up again, and added, in a touching tone,—

"Ah, my dear friend, you do not know what I have suffered—tongue cannot tell it, nor can pen write it. That blow did break my heart—broke it in the rending of its tenderest cords, and in the crushing of all its earthly hopes!——Do you believe in dreams?"

The mate started, not so much at the character of the question, as from the sudden manner in which it was put.

"Well," said Lester, in a lower tone, "I have had a dream repeated many times; but never has it come to me so directly and so vividly as within the past three or four days. *Carrie Thornton is not dead!* I know she is not!—she has appeared to me repeatedly in a dream, and calls upon me to save her! To-night, as I stood all alone by the mizzen rigging, trying to peer out into the thick gloom, I heard her voice as plainly as you now hear mine, and she called out for me to save her. Of course what followed was mere fancy, though even that affected me much: I thought I saw her, standing not far off, upon a huge sea, with her arms stretched imploringly towards me—saw her, then, with my eyes open, as I have often seen her in my sleeping dream!——"

At this point the captain was cut short in his speech by the cry of "LIGHT-HO!" from the deck. They hurried up and found the men crowding forward.

"What is it?" Lester asked.

"I think it is a light, sir," replied Parker. "Here, sir,—just stand here.—Now turn your eye about four points upon the larboard bow.—Wait, now, till she rises.—Ha—there!—there?—See!—Did you see it, sir?"

Yes—he had seen it; and he knew it must be a light upon the shore; but it was a great way off. He watched until he had seen it several times, and then he remarked to his mate that it must be a light house. The light was bold and distinct, and evidently at a considerable height above the level of the sea; for, had it not been so, it could not have been seen at that distance. After a short consultation, during which reference was had to the chart of the Northumberland coast, it was decided that this light must be upon Dorton Point. To the north of Dorton, as the captain knew from personal experience, as well as from the chart, there was a snug harbor, of easy entrance. These things were settled.

As soon as it had been determined where the light was, Captain Lester made all possible haste to determine his course of action. Had the thing been practicable, he would have laid his ship to; but that could not be done. No one even gave it a serious thought. So it was determined that the ship should stand on, at least till something further was discovered.

At half-past twelve the gale had moderated considerably. The light was now to be seen very plainly whenever the ship rose, and the captain and his officers felt sure that they were right in their calculations.

"At all events," said the former, "we have no choice but to stand on, at least——"

He was interrupted by a cry from the bows that made every soul start with horror:

"BREAKERS! BREAKERS!"

Captain Lester leaped forward, and in a very few moments he was satisfied that the warning had not been a false one; for he could not only hear the awful roar of the breaking seas, but he fancied that he could see the gleaming of the white foam as it flew high in the air. As quickly as possible the topsail was taken off, and the anchors cut loose. The ponderous grapplings plunged into the hissing sea, and the iron cable were spun through the hawse holes like lightning. Snap went the starboard chain; and in a moment more a shock was felt as the larboard anchor found bottom; but it could not hold. The cable parted as though it had been a hempen string, and on swept the devoted ship.

"In heaven's name!" gasped Griffin, "what does this mean? See! The light is still burning as brightly as ever—at least a league away—and yet here are the rocks directly under our bows! What can it mean?"

Maurice Lester did not answer; but an old weather-beaten sailor, who stood at the wheel, and who had looked a thousand dangers in the face, answered for him:

"IT'S A WRECKER'S BEACON! I've seen such things afore. There aint no use in firin' the gun, sir. That light was put there to lead poor Jack to his death that the coast sharks might pick his bones!"

"BREAKERS! ROCKS!—*On the starboard bows!——No!—On the larboard!*—PORT!"

But it was too late for mortal help. The ship had met her doom. She went upon the rocks with a crash that sounded high above the roar of the elements.

CHAPTER II.

WOLFGANG.

Maurice Lester was near the starboard gangway when the ship struck, having started aft to look to the helm. The shock threw him upon his back, and he tried to get up, but ere he could regain his feet the flood of mad waters came surging over the bark, and he was thrown—he knew not where. He only knew that the flood came—that it caught him in its giant grasp—that it hurled him as the gale hurls a feather—that his head was hurt—that his body was tossed and bruised—and then the lamp of his consciousness went out. When he came to himself it was daylight, and the rays of the sun were beaming above him. At first he did not attempt to move, any further than simply to assure himself that he was really alive and sensible; but sought to recall the events of the past, which he did, very clearly, up to the time when his ship struck upon the rocks,—he could go no farther. After this he raised himself upon his elbow, and tried to gaze about him. He found himself upon a bed of sand, between two immense rocks. He had been landed there in that deep nook, and the tide had gone out and left him. In a little while he rose to his feet, and managed to crawl up, by the aid of a stranded spar, over a long part of one of the rocks.

After seeing all that was to be observed from this point, he moved on towards where he thought he should soonest find an open beach, for he felt faint and he wished to find help as soon as possible. After toiling over slippery, slimy rocks, and cruel, tearing crags, until his clothing was all torn, and his flesh bruised and lacerated, he finally reached an open space among the rocks, where many pieces of the wreck had been lodged, and where he found the bodies of three of his men. He hastened to the spot where they lay—two of them being clasped in each other's arms—but he found no signs of life.

With a sad, heavy heart, Lester passed on, and presently he found two more dead ones, and one of them was David Griffin, his chief mate. He kneeled down by the officer's side, and raised the head; but it was cold and lifeless and the skull was broken!—Gently he laid it back upon the sand, and then moved on again. And he saw more dead men also! Could it be possible that he had been the only one left alive?

Ha!—wait—what is this? It moves—it has life!

Captain Lester hurried forward, as fast as his feeble strength would permit, and found two men lying by the side of a heavy spar. One of them was dead; but the other gazed up into his commander's face, and stretched forth his hands as though he would ask for mercy. His name was Dick Mangle, and he had been one of the best seamen on board the ship.

"Poor Dick!" said Lester, kneeling by his side and lifting his head. "Are you badly hurt?"

"They've done it for us!" the sailor answered, in a weakning voice. "They've killed Tom. Ain't he dead?"

It was the body of stout Tom Bricked that lay close by, and when the captain had made himself sure that there was no particle of life in it, he reported the same to Dick.

"But," he added, "what do you mean?—Who has done you harm?"

"Haven't you seen 'em?" the man asked, struggling for breath.

"Seen whom? What do you mean?" demanded Lester, eagerly.

Dick started up to his elbow, and gazed around; but he seemed to find nothing for which he was looking, and he sank back again. Had he not made this effort he might have spoken further, but the act of rising had exhausted him, and the last grain of strength was leaving him.

"What do you mean?" cried Lester, as he saw that the poor fellow was sinking.—"Has any body harmed you?"

Dick managed to rise his hand to his head—to a point above the left ear—and, as he did so, he whispered—

"Look out—they asked for the capt'n.—That's where they struck!" He tried to speak further, but his voice failed him.

What could this mean? Maurice Lester started to his feet and gazed around. Who had killed his men?

The captain was disturbed in his meditation by the sound of voices not far off, and upon turning he beheld four men coming up from the water. He who came in advance was a tall, muscular man; with a gaunt, heavy frame; somewhere about fifty or fifty five years of age; and habited in a garb of blue cloth, cut into a frock, or shirt, which was secured at the waist by a broad pistol-belt.

Maurice Lester was startled when he beheld the stalwart leader and his three ruffianly companions; and, considering all the circumstances, it is no wonder that he was startled. However, he had not much opportunity for reflection, for by the time he had fairly made out the party, they were upon him.

"Hallo," the leader cried, as he saw our hero, "here we have another." And, as he came up, he added: "And, I guess we've found a live one, too, one that knows something—Say—who are ye?"

This last sentence was addressed to Maurice, who quickly answered:

"My name is Lester. And now, to be fair, what is your name?"

"Well—I guess you've heard it before.—Men call me Ryan Wolfgang."

"WOLFGANG!" repeated Lester, with a start.

"Yes. That is my name."

Then WOLFGANG was not a myth after all. That mysterious wrecker, whose name was a source of terror to honest sailors, was a being of flesh and blood, like other men—Maurice gazed upon him with wonder; and, as he gazed, he felt that he looked upon a fiend incarnate. He had often heard of the pirate wrecker, and so dark and mystic had been the tales which the North-Sea sailors had told, that he had been inclined to believe that the whole theme was a fabrication—Now, however, he had no more doubt, for the man before him looked as dark and bloody as were any of the pictures he had ever heard drawn of him upon the forecastle.

But our hero was not allowed much time for reflection. Wolfgang plied him with questions, to all of which Lester gave straightforward answers; well knowing that evasion would serve no practical purpose, and hoping by his frankness to propitiate the merciless fiend in whose unrestrained power he knew himself to be.

When the wrecker chief had elicited all the information he could, and learned with what a rich cargo the vessel was freighted, and that she had $40,000 in specie on board, he smiled grimly, and remarked to one of his confederates that she would perhaps be a richer prize even than the *White Fawn* had been a few years before. The mention of the name of the ill-fated ship in which Carrie Thornton and her father had been lost, gave Maurice Lester such a shock that he nearly fell to the earth. He grew deadly pale, and his frame quivered convulsively.

"What's the matter?" said Wolfgang.—"You don't seem to have much strength left!—Bring him along, boys, where we can *doctor* him."

The sinister glance which accompanied this last remark, and the peculiar emphasis laid upon the word "*doctor*," struck a chill to our hero's heart. But he could not give his own safety much thought, while he was partly forced and partly carried along after Wolfgang, who strode rapidly on for nearly half an hour. He could think only of the *White Fawn* that had been wrecked on that coast, and of his Carrie who had, perhaps, in company with those same men, trod the same path he was now treading. What had been her fate! Had she been murdered by these wretches, or reserved for some more deplorable doom! These thoughts filled him with unutterable agony.

Wolfgang had now drawn near the water's edge; and soon coming to the mouth of a cave he entered it, followed by the three ruffians who had charge of our hero. The bottom of the cave sloped upward from its entrance for some distance, and then became almost level. The captive, (for such Maurice Lester now felt himself to be,) frequently hit his feet against what he thought, with a chill of horror, were human bones strewn around the cavern, but he could not clearly make them out in the dim light. He also noticed that the bottom of the cave was very wet, as though it had recently been covered with water. The wrecker chieftain stopped, at last, near what seemed the end of the cave, and making a sign to his followers, they clapped manacles on the wrists and ankles of Maurice before he had time to note their intention.

"Now, Captain Lester," said Wolfgang, "you must remain in this place for a short season. *You are perfectly safe here.* Silence! Say not a word! If you attempt to leave this spot, you will be slain the moment you set foot outside the cave."

Thus speaking, the chieftain and his followers silently but rapidly withdrew, leaving Maurice nearly stupefied with astonishment. As they passed from the mouth of the cave, their feet were wet by the rising waves.—*The tide was fast coming in.*

After a short time, the captive looked about him with eyes somewhat accustomed to the dim light, and became satisfied that what he had supposed to be human bones were really such. There were many of them. And moving among them were huge rats, seeking for prey. The top of the cavern, in some places, was but a few feet above his head, and in one place he discovered a small aperture, through which a faint light struggled, and on going underneath it, he thought he smelled the odor of vegetation and flowers.

On turning, from the contemplation of this aperture, towards the mouth of the cave, Captain Lester observed, with alarm, that the water was creeping up the sloping bottom. What if it should fill the cavern?—Ah! now he could account for the presence there of those human bones. They were the sad memorials of other hopeless prisoners who had been left in that cave to *perish by drowning*.

Slowly but surely the waters crept along. The vermin fled before them to the elevated spot on which Maurice stood. Slowly following, the incoming water at length reached his feet!

At the end of the cave, within a few feet of the wall, and underneath the aperture before spoken of, was a large piece of rock, some four feet high, that might have fallen from above. To this Maurice hastened as quickly as his manacles would permit.—After some exertion he succeeded in climbing to the top of it, and stood erect, his head within a few inches of the roof of the cavern. But he was not allowed to occupy this retreat alone. As the water began to circle round its base, the rats also sought refuge on it in great numbers, and in vain did Maurice try to dislodge them with his manacled feet.

Soon (as it seemed to the captive) the water came rippling over the top of the rock. He felt its moisture upon his feet.—And still it rose—slowly but relentlessly it rose higher—higher; and as it rose, the rats climbed up his limbs for safety. It was in vain that he brushed them off with his fettered hands. They instantly returned.—They clambered up his back—to his shoulders—over the back of his neck—to the crown of his head; their clammy bodies striking a chill to his very heart.

And still higher the waters rose, and more thickly the foul vermin clustered upon the devoted captive's shoulders and head, as their only places of safety. Driven frantic at last by the horror of his situation, he was about to plunge into the surging tide and seek a watery grave, when his attention was arrested by the tread of rapid footsteps near the aperture above his head, and the sounds of a harsh masculine voice, almost instantly followed by a noise as of a struggle, and a piercing shriek which thrilled Maurice Lester to the very soul. He could not be mistaken; it was CARRIE'S voice. Again he heard it, but now in tones of entreaty. Oh, it *was* her voice. She was *not* dead! She lived and was near him! Gathering all his strength, he shouted, "Carrie! *Carrie!* CARRIE!"

A dead silence followed, broken only by the fearful murmurs of the still rising waters, and the splash of the rats as they fell from the wretched captive's head and shoulders, only to return again, in their fierce struggles for a perch of safety from the advancing tide, which had now nearly reached our hero's shoulders.

The above is all of this story that will be published in our columns. We give this as a sample. The continuation of it from where it leaves off here can be found only in the New York Ledger, the great family paper, to which the most popular writers of the country contribute, and which is for sale at all the stores throughout the city and country, where papers are sold. Remember and ask for the New York Ledger of January 7, and in it you will find the continuation of the story from where it leaves off here.—If you cannot get a copy at any book store, the publisher of the Ledger will mail you a copy if you will send him five cents in a letter.

The Ledger is mailed to subscribers at $2 a year, or two copies for $3. Address your letters to Robert Bonner, publisher, 48 Ann street, New York. It is the handsomest and best family paper in the country, elegantly illustrated and [illegible] characterized by a high moral tone. Its present circulation is over four hundred thousand copies, which is the best evidence we can give of its merits.

President's Message.

Fellow Citizens of the Senate and House of Representatives:

Our deep and heartfelt gratitude is due to that Almighty Power which has bestowed upon us such varied and numerous blessings throughout the past year. The general health of the country has been excellent; our harvests have been unusually plentiful, and prosperity smiles throughout the land. Indeed, notwithstanding our demerits, we have much reason to believe from the past events in our history, that we have enjoyed the special protection of Divine Providence ever since our origin as a nation. We have been exposed to many threatening and alarming difficulties in our progress, but on each successive occasion the impending cloud has been dissipated at the moment it appeared ready to burst upon our heads, and the danger to our institutions has passed away. May we ever be under the Divine guidance and protection!

Whilst it is the duty of the President "from time to time to give to Congress information of the state of the Union," I shall not refer in detail to the recent sad and bloody occurrences at Harper's Ferry. Still, it is proper to observe that these events, however bad and cruel in themselves, derive their chief importance from the apprehension that they are but symptoms of an incurable disease in the public mind, which may break out in still more dangerous outrages and terminate at last in an open war by the North to abolish slavery in the South. Whilst, for myself I entertain no such apprehension, they ought to afford a solemn warning to us all to beware of the approach of danger. Our Union is a stake of such inestimable value as to demand our constant and watchful vigilance for its preservation. In this view let me implore my countrymen, North and South, to cultivate the ancient feeling of mutual forbearance and good will towards each other, and strive to allay the demon spirit of sectional strife now alive in the land. This advice proceeds from the heart of an old public functionary whose services commenced in the last generation, among the wise and conservative statesmen of that day, now nearly all passed away, and whose first and dearest earthly wish is to leave his country tranquil, prosperous, united and happy.

We ought to reflect that in this age, and especially in this country, there is an incessant flux and reflux of public opinion. Questions which in their day assumed a most threatening aspect, have now nearly gone forth from the memory of men. They are "volcanoes burnt out, and on the lava and ashes and squalid scoria of old eruptions grow the peaceful olive, the cheering vine, and the sustaining corn." Such in my opinion will prove to be the fate of the present sectional excitement, should those who wisely seek to apply the remedy, continue always to confine their efforts within the pale of the Constitution. If this course be pursued, the existing agitation on the subject of domestic Slavery, like everything human, will have its day and give place to other and less threatening controversies. Public opinion in this country is all powerful, and when it reaches a dangerous excess upon any question, the good sense of the people will furnish the corrective and bring it back within safe limits. Still, to hasten this auspicious result, at the present crisis, we ought to remember that every rational creature must be presumed to intend the natural consequences of his own teachings. Those who announce abstract doctrines subversive to the Constitution and the Union, must not be surprised should their heated partisans advance one step further, and attempt by violence to carry these doctrines into effect. In this view of the subject it ought never to be forgotten that, however great may have been the political advantages resulting from the Union to every portion of our common country, these would all prove to be as nothing should the time ever arrive when they cannot be enjoyed without serious danger to the personal safety of the people of fifteen members of the confederacy. If the peace of the domestic fireside throughout these States should ever be invaded—if the mothers of families within this extensive region should not be able to retire to rest at night without suffering dreadful apprehensions of what may be their own fate and that of their children before the morning—it would be in vain to recount to such a people the political benefits which result to them from the Union.—Self-preservation is the first instinct of nature; and therefore any state of society in which the sword is all the time suspended over the heads of the people, must at last become intolerable. But I indulge in no such gloomy forebodings. On the contrary, I firmly believe that the events at Harper's Ferry, by causing the people to pause and reflect upon this possible peril of their cherished institutions, will be the means, under Providence, of allaying the existing excitement and preventing future outbreaks of a similar character. They will resolve that the Constitution and the Union shall not be endangered by rash counsels, knowing that, "should the silver cord be loosed or the golden bowl be broken * * at the fountain," human power could never re unite the scattered and hostile fragments.

I cordially congratulate you upon the final settlement by the Supreme Court of the United States of the question of slavery in the territories; which had presented an aspect so truly formidable at the commencement of my administration. The right has been established of every citizen to take his property of any kind, including slaves, into the common territories belonging equally to all the States in the confederacy, and to have it protected there under the federal constitution. Neither Congress nor a Territorial Legislature nor any human power has any authority to annul or impair this vested right. The supreme judicial tribunal of the country, which is a co-ordinate branch of the government, has sanctioned and affirmed these principles of constitutional law, so manifestly just in themselves, and so well calculated to promote peace and harmony among the States. It is a striking proof of the sense of justice which is inherent in our people, that the property in slaves has never been disturbed, to my knowledge, in any of the territories. Even throughout the late troubles in Kansas there had not been any attempt, as I am credibly informed, to interfere in a single instance with the right of the master. Had any such attempt been made, the judiciary would doubtless have afforded an ample remedy. Should they fail to do this hereafter, it will then be time enough to strengthen their hands by further legislation. Had it been decided that either Congress or the territorial legislature possess the power to annul or impair the right to property in slaves, the evil would be intolerable. In the latter event, there would be a struggle for a majority of the members of the Legislature, at each successive election, and the sacred rights of property held under the federal constitution would depend for the time being on the result. The agitation would thus be rendered incessant whilst the territorial condition remained, and its baneful influence would keep alive a dangerous excitement among the people of the several States.

Thus has the status of a territory during the intermediate period from its first settlement until it shall become a State, been irrevocably fixed by the final decision of the Supreme Court. Fortunate has this been for the prosperity of the Territories, as well as the tranquility of the States. Now emigrants from the North and the South, the East and the West, will meet in the territories on a common platform, having brought with them that species of property best adapted, in their own opinion, to promote their welfare. From natural causes slavery will in each case soon virtually settle itself, and before the territory is prepared for admission as a State into the Union, this decision will, one way or the other, have been a forgone conclusion. Meanwhile the settlement of the new territory will proceed without serious interruption, and its progress and prosperity will not be endangered or retarded by violent political struggles.

When in the progress of events the inhabitants of any Territory shall have reached the number required to form a State, they shall then proceed in a regular manner, and in the exercise of the rights of popular sovereignity, to form a Constitution preparatory to admission into the Union. After this has been done, to employ the language of the Kansas and Nebraska act, they "shall be received into the Union with or without Slavery, as their constitution may prescribe at the time of their admission." This sound principle has happily been recognized, in some form or other, by an almost unanimous vote of both Houses of the last Congress.

All lawful means at my command have been employed, and shall continue to be employed, to execute the laws against the African Slave trade. After a most careful and rigorous examination of our coasts and a thought investigation of the subject, we have not been able to discover that any slaves have been imported into the United States except the cargo by the Wanderer, numbering between three and four hundred. Those engaged in the unlawful enterprise have been rigorously prosecuted; but not with as much success as their crimes have deserved. A number of them are still under prosecution.

Our history proves that the Fathers of the Republic, in advance of all other nations, condemned the African Slave trade. It was, notwithstanding, deemed expedient by the framers of the Constitution, to deprive Congress of the power to prohibit "the migration or importation of such persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit" "prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight."

It will be seen that this restriction on the power of Congress was confined to such States only as might think proper to admit the importation of slaves. It did not extend to other States or to the trade carried on abroad. Accordingly, we find that so early as the 22d March, 1794, Congress passed an act imposing severe penalties and punishments upon citizens and residents of the United States who should engage in this trade between foreign nations. The provisions of this Act were extended and enforced by the Act of 10th May, 1800.

Again: The States themselves had a clear right to waive the constitutional privilege intended for their benefit, and to prohibit, by their own laws, this trade, at any time they thought proper previous to 1808. Several of them exercised this right before that period, and among them some containing the greatest number of slaves. This gave to Congress the immediate power to act in regard to all such States, because they themselves had removed the constitutional barrier. Congress accordingly passed an act on the 28th February, 1803, "to prevent the importation of certain persons into certain States, where by the laws thereof, their admission is prohibited." In this manner the importation of African slaves into the United States was, to a great extent, prohibited some years in advance of 1808.

As the year 1808 approached, Congress determined not to suffer this trade to exist even for a single day after they had the power to abolish it. On the 21st of March, 1807, they passed an act to take effect "from and after the 1st of January, 1808," prohibiting the importation of African slaves into the United States. This was followed by subsequent acts of a similar character, to which I need not specially refer. Such were the principles and such the practice of our ancestors more than fifty years ago in regard to the African slave trade.

It did not occur to the revered patriots who had been delegated to the Convention, and afterwards became members of Congress, that in passing these laws they had violated the Constitution which they had framed with so much care and deliberation. They supposed that to prohibit Congress, in express terms, from exercising a specified power before an appointed day, necessarily involved the right to exercise this power after that day had arrived.

If this were not the case, the framers of the Constitution had expended much labor in vain. Had they imagined that Congress would possess no power to prohibit the trade even before or after 1808, they would not have taken so much care to protect the States against the exercise of this power before that period. Nay, more, they would not have attached such vast importance to this provision as to have excluded it from the possibility of future repeal or amendment, to which other portions of the Constitution were exposed. It would, then, have been wholly unnecessary to engraft on the fifth article of the Constitution, prescribing the mode of its future amendment, the proviso, "that no amendment which may be made prior to the year one thousand eight hundred and eight, shall in any manner affect" the provision in the Constitution securing to the States the right to admit the importation of African slaves previous to that period.

According to the adverse construction, the clause itself, on which so much care and discussion had been employed by the members of the Convention, was an absolute nullity from the beginning, and all that has since been done under it a mere usurpation.

It was well and wise to confer this power on Congress, because had it been left to the States its efficient exercise would have been impossible. In that event any one State could have effectually continued the trade not only for itself but for all the other Slave States, though never so much against their will. And why? Because African slaves, who once brought within the limits of any one State, in accordance with its laws,

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